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AUTHOR Davis, Howard V.
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INSTITUTION Southern Illinois Univ., Edwardsville.
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the comparative newness of elementary school counseling, and the need to develop theoretical bases which, of course, are psychologically and educationally sound. Various theoretical models which have meaning for elementary counseling are considered. These include: (1) developmental and/or growth counseling theory which recognizes the need to work with the child where he is and stresses the best use of his developmental capabilities and potentialities; (2) learning theories as approaches to elementary counseling, e.g., operant conditioning as a tactic; and (3) the work of Piaget. The author believes that truly differential theories are hard to find because of a lack of really valid research in the field. The paper concludes by asking and pointing a direction for answers to the question: What is to be the theoretical basis for elementary school counseling? (TL)

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UTILIZING CURRENT COUNSELING THEORY IN ELEMENTARY COUNSELING

Theory in elementary guidance has often seemed to be somewhat like Mark Twain's comment about the weather in which many talk about it, yet few do anything about it. In the November, 1969, issue of Today's Education, June and Harold Shane (11) wrote that as recently as 1965 one could find almost no elementary guidance programs in primary or elementary schools, but that since that time "emphasis on providing guidance services at an early age has become little short of spectacular." It now seems that in education one of our commitments is to the development of theory for elementary school counseling which will utilize all resources at hand as we labor to assist youngsters to understand and accept themselves and become responsible for the direction of their own actions. And this is not the same old warmed-over secondary school counseling concept, but it is a fresh new look at counseling for elementary school children. As such, it is something new and different from the old approaches.

Nor is new theory for elementary counseling developed just for the sake of the theory. Elementary counselors are pragmatic enough to realize that any theory development must succeed or fail in the test of practice in the "real world" and apart from the never-never land of the college or university textbook. Also since many professional people, in addition to counselors, will be working with theory, it may be said that it is too bad to waste the theory on counselors. In other words, theory is no good if we keep it to ourselves and don't share it with our colleagues whose acceptance we will need anyway if we are to be successful in our counseling endeavors. We must keep in mind, however, that many school counselors will agree with Helen D. Smith (12) who says, "I thought I'd

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choke on theory. Teachers were ramming their neat little learned theories down my throat. It was nauseating." It seems then that while counseling theory has been abundant, its importance has not necessarily been overwhelmingly apparent to the consumer - the corps of school counselors who are on the firing line in daily contact with real, live kids who need their services.

One thing does seem clear as we utilize counseling theory: the primary work of the school counselor is to assist in the teaching-learning process while fostering social and emotional well being in the children with whom we counsel. Therefore, our innovations in counseling as they pertain to the elementary school must be based on premises which are generally assumed to be psychologically and educationally sound. Although we cannot always prove that what we do is psychologically and educationally sound, we must keep on experimenting and trying out what our reason tells us will emphasize the positive effects of human nature. After all, Fred Fiedler's study of the application of counseling theories indicates that while theory is important, it is the counselor as an instrument of theory which makes meaning to the theory and the success of all theories seems to depend greatly on the counselor.

Some counselors, according to Henry R. Kaczkowski (6), seem to feel hindered rather than helped by counseling theory with the question seeming to be, "Is there any way I can be a good counselor without being weighed down by theory?" Combs and Soper (3) in their study of the helping relationship found that almost any kind of behavior is helpful if the intent of the helper is to help. Thus we are motivated to think that counseling theory is highly important especially when coupled with a helpful attitude.

Let us then turn to some of the theoretical models which have meaning for elementary counseling. Basic assumptions for elementary counseling theory seem to cluster around three things which Anna R. Meeks (7) cites as necessary to be understood: (1) The child does have a measure of control over a limited aspect of this environment; (2) The child is unique in genetic and cultural factors which determine his approach to learning; and (3) Basically every child is motivated toward the best possible use of his time. During the past few years the counseling theory which has seemed to fit these basic assumptions best has been what we call "developmental guidance" or "developmental counseling." This theory provides for guidance and counseling on a continuing scale which recognizes a need to work with youngsters at the place where they are. This seems so logical that one wonders why it is necessary even to call this a theory, but we often have operated as if the child must be at the place where he is supposed to be. In other words, we have often operated as if growing and developing occur at the same rate and the same quality for all children.

It is easy to agree with Dinkmeyer (4) that there are two basic approaches to using theory in the elementary school: (1) That which we call developmental counseling, which is not always problem-centered but which focuses on the development of self-understanding and methods for solving the developmental tasks; and (2) counseling for the modification of behavior and attitudes, which often is problem-centered and attempts to change a child's faulty and confused convictions, percepts, attitudes, and behavior. Principles and processes are somewhat similar, but there is a difference in emphasis between the two approaches. Lester N. Downing has extended developmental counseling into what he terms

"growth" counseling. This concept uses the child's developmental processes and potentialities for building self-confidence, developing a positive self-esteem, and creating an affirmative self-image. Notice that "growth" counseling focuses on the positive and affirmative aspects of assisting the child to make the best use of his developmental capabilities and potentialities. As in developmental counseling, the "Growth" counselor places emphasis on working with the child to achieve the child's goals while the counselor for modification of attitudes and behavior works to help the youngster understand his symptoms and reasons for inability to solve his own problems.

It is the role of the developmental or growth counselor to design for the child a set of experiences which will help him in the mastery of developmental tasks. Blocher (2) thinks that the counselor "seeks to promote creative discountent and to enhance the individual's ability to cope with stress in positive ways." Thus he says that counselors accustomed to reducing anxiety may find that utilizing anxiety is an uncomfortable stance. The counselor is active, operates in the present, and is deeply involved with his counselee. This approach has great meaning for the counselor if he realizes the nature of children who are engaged in learning new behavior rather than in finding out historically why they did what they did. Understandably, then, a theory which leads itself to work with youngsters full of energy and eager to try out new behaviors is exciting and appropriate.

Not all of the counseling theorists, however, rely upon developmental and/or growth counseling theory. A sizable number of theorists are continuing to explore learning theories as approaches to counseling in the elementary school. Jules M. Zimmer (14), for example, has explored

learning principles, especially operant conditioning, as a "tactic." In this kind of counseling situation the teacher and counselor work together as primary agents for changing human behavior. Also the counselor would serve as a "feedback" specialist about desired child behavior and desired outcomes and would serve in a preventive role.

Closely allied to the growth theory of counseling is the work of Piaget who is accorded an impact upon guidance by John C. Gowan, Doris Coole, and Peggy McDonald (5). The theory of Piaget indicates that children pass through four major stages or levels of ability in forming their concepts of experiences: (1) Sensory-motor period; (2) Pre-operational thought period; (3) Concrete operations period; (4) Propositional or formal logic period. According to the theory, counselors who become familiar with these stages of cognitive development will have a new means of understanding children. Piaget's stages somewhat parallel Erikson's stages of emotional development which are concerned with ego-strength of the person. Agreement is found that knowledge of Piaget's concepts will assist counselors to work with curriculum, achievement testing, and creativity. Understanding of the work of Piaget and sharing the knowledge of his work with teachers is one way of increasing effectiveness of the learning process.

One must search long and hard to find truly differential theories of counseling for elementary school children, in part because of the lack of really valid research in the field. It is possible to find a number of summaries of belief such as the following: Allport's (1) belief that guidance must recognize man's proactive future-minded growth as the basis for professional counseling; Meyerson and Michael's (8) thinking that the behavioristic model (which is rejected by Allport) is the only sound basis

for the development of a scientific and ultimately effective guidance function; Van Kaam and Rogers' (10) belief in the subjective dynamics of counselee and counselor interaction, which is dismissed by Meyerson and Michael, as of utmost importance; and Rogers' assertion that the success of counseling depends not on training, severity of counselee's problem, or theoretical orientation but on the quality of the counseling relationship. Thus it is easy to see that without empirical research to contraindicate one is relatively free to design his own theory for counseling and work for its acceptance.

As we survey the field of elementary counseling in relation to theory, we find, as is expressed in today's vernacular, that we have a "mixed bag." Views of man range from the strict deterministic to that of a completely uninhibited being, from the ultimate behavioristic attitude toward the loosest construction of man as a creature able to deal with unlimited choice, from a being that is inherently evil to one that is inherently good. Therefore theory does make a difference if only because our theory is determined by how we regard man. It is easy to agree with Allport (1) that our current theories of learning are only partial and deal best with the learning of animals and very young children, but learning theories are often not very helpful in terms of counseling and commitment.

One can find very easy agreement with the person who describes individuals as (1) rational beings depending upon communication and interaction with others; (2) active, dynamic, "doing," beings with emotional health related to individual competence, and (3) choice-making individuals. So we see that the counseling task is to provide the process whereby many people perform many functions over the entire life span of

a learner and which fosters the development of the unique nature of the learner. The counselor in the elementary school will concentrate on helping the teacher through his theoretical framework to assist the learner in the classroom. In other words, the counselor must be the facilitator in this whole sequential process.

In the end then, the elementary counselor is faced with the dilemma: What is to be the theoretical basis for my counseling duties in the elementary school? Am I going to be committed, as is Van Kaam (13), to existence with our ears not deafened by the noise of theories? Am I going to agree with the behavioral approach to counseling in which the environment must be manipulated so as to allow reinforcement designed to effect desired behavior? Am I going to insist that acceptance, congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard are the necessary ingredients in our counseling mix? Am I going to insist that learning theory is the most satisfactory framework for counseling in spite of the knowledge that many counselors operate from trait-factor theory? Am I going to agree with the developmental counseling theorists that counseling should emphasize growth with particular sighting-in on the "normal" developmental problems and tasks as well as on the development of the self-concept which is so necessary for effective individual functioning? Or am I to espouse a concept such as that of "Growth Counseling" which goes beyond the others in dealing with positive aspects of self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-image?

Growth counseling seems naturally to fit where developmental counseling leaves off and emphasizes the positive aspects of self-theory, so-called. The encouragement of appropriate behavior change, maximum use of the environment, reduction of anxieties and frustrations, and

commitment to maximum personal growth as well as to high achievement are important elements in this theory for elementary counseling.

It is easy to agree with Kurt Lewin who said, "Nothing is so practical as a good theory." The development of theory is an important facet of collating what we know in the field of counseling when directed toward the attempt to gauge human processes and gain better understanding of the inter-relationships between forces assisting or impeding the learning process. Ratigan (9) thinks that the beginner is "erratically selective"; then he selects the theory which attracts him; and as he becomes skillful, he works out a theory of his own. Thus theory creates practice and practice creates theory." No matter how we look at theory and no matter what concept we finally adopt, let it be positive, let it be suitable to change and to growth, and let it facilitate the growth and development of the competence and adequate personality of our elementary school children.

Howard V. Davis
Professor of Counselor Education
Southern Illinois University
Edwardsville, Illinois

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